

Finding a Mentor

Some of the most valuable professional relationships are found outside your traditional circle of coworkers and friends. Challenge yourself to foster relationships beyond the office and you might develop a productive relationship with a mentor who can help guide your career growth and professional development. Check out the YALI Network blog post [Getting the Most From Your Mentoring Relationship](#) to learn more about mentorship and its benefits. If you decide you would like to pursue such a relationship, it is important to think strategically about how you could use this type of support, and incorporate finding a mentor into your career planning.

Finding a mentor does not necessarily require a formal process, but it does require planning, commitment, and sincerity. A mentor relationship often can grow naturally as you build and strengthen personal connections beyond your existing social circle. Keep reading for tips on finding a mentor, and check out the [YALI Network Mentor Meeting tool](#) for information on getting the most out of your time with your mentor.

1. **Look for formal programs.** Quite a few large companies offer mentorship programs to their employees, so it is worth looking into whether your workplace offers such an opportunity. If not, and you would prefer a structured program rather than a do-it-yourself approach, there are organized groups, such as [Mara Mentor](#), that offer mentorship opportunities. Research online or ask around among your contacts to find additional programs. However, if you are interested in finding a mentor on your own, the following tips will help you!
2. **Build your professional connections.** You never know who might end up being a valuable mentor, so it's worth developing relationships with a variety of people. As those relationships grow, you may find one person in particular that you connect with, and who is interested in supporting your personal and career growth. For more information on developing your network, check out the lesson [Networking to Get Ahead](#) from the YALI Network Online Courses and the [Professional Networking 101](#) blog post.
3. **Use your school connections.** Many people find their first mentor while at university, simply by building close relationships with instructors whose experiences and perspectives they particularly respect. If you are in school or a recent graduate, consider keeping in touch with teachers who may be interested in providing ongoing guidance. Even if you are already long past your university years, there may be an alumni group through which you can find potential mentors.
4. **Look beyond those similar to you.** It can be tempting to find a mentor who is very similar to you, as it can be easier to envision modeling your career after that person's. However, sometimes the most insightful guidance comes from people very dissimilar to you. Think about people of different genders, ethnicities, and even career fields as potential mentors.
5. **Consider multiple mentors.** A singular, main point of contact is valuable when seeking guidance over a long period of time, however, it can be beneficial to include several people with different backgrounds and diverse perspectives as you grow and develop. A wider mentor group makes you better equipped when handling an unexpected or unusual challenge, so you might consider having a range of mentors with whom you engage at different times.
6. **Don't forget about your peers.** Most people think of a mentor as someone older and wiser. However, your peers also can offer unique perspectives on your goals and challenges. Consider forming a peer networking group to tap into this potential.

7. **Pay it forward.** Mentorship only works when people make the decision to share their knowledge and experience with those who could benefit from it, often for little or no concrete benefit to themselves. One of the best ways you can express your appreciation for those who have assisted you, whether in a formal mentorship capacity or by providing more informal guidance, is to support others as they progress through their careers.
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Professional Networking 101

Whether you're a student, professional, or entrepreneur, having a strong network can make a world of difference when it comes to achieving your goals. While professional networking is often associated with job hunting, its benefits are numerous: in addition to career opportunities, your professional network may offer business leads, knowledge resources, and even lasting friendships.

So what exactly is professional networking? Put simply, it's the process of deliberately building and maintaining relationships with others in your professional sphere. In the "[Networking to Get Ahead](#)" lesson, Sadhana Hall shares this insight:

To be the best at what you do, you need to surround yourself with people who inspire you, who motivate you, and who challenge you. People who ask you difficult questions and provide honest feedback. Networking is the practice of intentionally seeking out these people...it's just as tangible and necessary as your technical skills.

Professional networking involves meeting a variety of people who you may not otherwise meet or socialize with. The key is to keep an open mind: even people with whom you have little in common could turn out to be some of your most valuable connections.

HOW TO BUILD YOUR NETWORK

Keep in mind that building your professional network is a *process* that requires sincerity and dedication; it can't be done overnight. That said, there are many opportunities to establish useful relationships. For example:

- **Reach out to your personal contacts:** While they may not share your career interests, your personal contacts are extremely valuable when it comes to networking. Start by creating a list of everyone you know: friends, family, and neighbors, as well as current and past employers, coworkers, teachers, and classmates. Reach out to these people and share your goals, plans, and questions with them; chances are, they can refer you to others who may be helpful.
- **Request informational interviews:** An informational interview is a meeting to gain insight and/or advice from someone with experience in your field of interest. Unlike a job interview, you initiate and conduct the interview with someone who you hope to learn from. For helpful tips, check out our resource on [How to Have a Successful Informational Interview](#).
- **Attend conferences or formal networking events:** Industry and/or professional events present

a ripe opportunity to build your network: it is perfectly acceptable to strike up a conversation with a stranger in this context. Sadhana Hall recommends the following approach: “Begin your conversation with what you know about the person or the organization, talk about your common interests, and build your conversation from there. Let them know how you can possibly help them.”

- **Leverage digital networks:** Social media, such as LinkedIn and Facebook, are optimal for connecting with people who have similar professional interests and goals. A good way to start is by asking people you already know to make “digital introductions” with people you would like to network with (e.g., by email or LinkedIn message). You can also join online groups or forums to build relationships with people who share your interests.

Plus: Don’t forget to join the [YALI Network face2face group](#) on Facebook to connect with like-minded leaders and learn about important events in your community!


HOW TO MAINTAIN YOUR NETWORK

Sadhana Hall reminds us to think of a professional network as “something that is alive and requires time and attention to stay healthy and relevant.” It is not enough to call upon your contacts only when you need their help: you must also think about how you can help them. For example:

- **Pass along relevant information:** Reach out to your contacts when something reminds you of them, such as an article or event they might like. Simple gestures such as these clearly demonstrate that you are thinking of others’ needs.
- **Facilitate mutually beneficial introductions:** If you know two people who share similar interests or goals, connect them! You can facilitate an introduction in-person (if you have the opportunity), use social media such as LinkedIn, or send both parties an email. Be sure to mention how you know each person and how they might benefit from connecting.
- **Reach out in advance of a job search:** In the event that you are looking for a new job, it’s appropriate to call upon your professional network to help you. You can request job leads or relevant contacts for informational interviews, and/or seek advice from your network. Keep your contacts informed of your progress, and *always* acknowledge their assistance with a note of thanks.

Though building a professional network can be challenging at first, your efforts will be worthwhile in the long term. And remember: the best time to build relationships is *before* you need them. Good luck!

[Avoid these common CV and resume mistakes!](#)

A training specialist offers advice to a job seeker at a resume-building seminar in  Arizona. (© AP Images)

Pity the poor job recruiter who has to sort through an inbox that is usually overflowing with applications from would-be employees. If you are one of the hundreds or even thousands of people competing for the same position, you will need your resume or curriculum vitae (CV) to stand out from the others. In most cases it is a recruiter's first impression of you, so a well-written and well-coordinated document is your only chance to get your foot in the door.

Tom LeaMond is a career consultant at Devex, a business and recruiting organization that focuses on global development. In a [webinar](#), he offered some helpful tips that many job candidates overlook in their efforts to impress future employers.

- Remember that the top of the page where you list your summary and key qualifications is the most important section, since it will determine if the reviewer wants to read more. Be sure to include job-specific keywords and phrases that match the position description.
- Use bullet points in the sections where you describe your job experience, in a manner that LeaMond called the CAR (context + action + results) approach. For example, "Led team of five direct reports in a previously underperforming office. After six months, our office achieved the fastest growth rate in the organization."
- Give a professional-sounding email address as your means of contact (for example, name@gmail.com instead of footballer@hotmail.com), but don't use the address at your current job.
- CVs can vary from country to country, so search online for sample resumes from a specific country if you are unfamiliar with what is normally included or not included there.

LeaMond said the most common mistake people make is not having a well-written CV that shows their experience and is tailored to the job description.

For more information on how to present yourself to a prospective employer, be sure to read the articles on writing a [personal biography](#) and an [admissions essay](#). You can also take a free YALI Network [Online Course](#). Be sure to check back with the [YALI Network](#) blog for additional advice on writing and other tips for your professional development.

[How to Prepare for a Successful Interview](#)

Interviewing for a job can be stressful. You want to make a good impression, but there is a lot at stake and you can't always anticipate what will happen. *Will you be asked a question you don't know how to answer? Will you appear nervous?* Remember that interviewing is a skill: you can improve your abilities with preparation and practice. Whether you're interviewing for a new job (or you are selected to interview for the Mandela Washington Fellowship), thorough preparation is the key to success:

1. Do Your Research.

- **Spend some time learning about the company** or organization you're applying to, including its history, mission, and leadership team. If the organization has a blog, news releases, and/or social media channels, be sure to explore them.
- **Investigate the organization from the outside in.** Who are their top competitors? What are the biggest challenges or issues facing the organization? A simple Google search should help you find the information you need.
- If you **know who your interviewer is**, learn about their background and current role ([LinkedIn](#) or other professional networking sites are a good resources for this).

2. Anticipate the Questions—and Plan Your Responses.

- Familiarize yourself with common interview questions in your industry and **think about the single-most important thing that you want to communicate**. Perhaps you want to showcase your creativity, leadership abilities, or versatile skills. Write your responses down so you can study and refine them; when possible, add anecdotes or “proof points” to strengthen your argument. For example, “I am a trusted and reliable manager. Over the past three years, I have gone from managing a team of two direct reports to a team of eight.”
- **Perfect your 30-second elevator speech.** Requests such as “Tell me about yourself” or “Walk me through your background” are common at the beginning of an interview; your answer is important because it sets the tone for the rest of the meeting. Your elevator speech should pertain to the job you are applying for only—don't give a detailed breakdown of your resume or share irrelevant details about your personal life. Instead, focus on your passions, skills, and what interests you about the organization to which you are applying. If you don't know where to start, fill out the “Accomplishments and Leadership” section of the [YALI Network Biography Questionnaire](#) [PDF 107 kb]. And remember, keep it short! Thirty seconds is plenty of time to get your key points across.
- Know your strengths and **know how to talk about your weaknesses**. Be prepared to share three or four strengths including examples of how you have demonstrated these skills. For example, “Creative writing is one of my greatest strengths. I studied poetry and six of my stories have been published in fiction magazines.” On the contrary, when you talk about your weaknesses, emphasize what you are doing to address and/or improve them. You might say “Public speaking is a challenge for me, but the more I can practice and prepare in advance of a speech, the better I perform.”

3. Prepare Questions of Your Own.

- While it may feel strange to “interview” your interviewer, you should always compile a list of questions prior to the meeting. **Asking questions is another way to demonstrate that you have done your research** and are serious about the opportunity. Need some ideas? Check out our new resource, [Good Questions to Ask During an Interview](#) [PDF 80 kb].

4. Practice, Practice, Practice.

- *Thinking* about how you will answer a question is one thing; saying it aloud is another. **Consider asking a friend to conduct a mock interview**, where they ask questions and you give your best (practiced) responses. A mock interview is a great opportunity to identify your areas for improvement; perhaps you manage an important project at work, but have a hard time explaining your role and what you do. If you can't do a mock interview, try reciting your interview responses

in the mirror, or use a recording device to review your speech.

- **Plan how you will approach a question you are unsure how to answer.** It's okay to take a deep breath, repeat a question back, and/or collect your thoughts for a few moments before you respond.

5. Don't Forget to Sleep

- Hours of interview prep can be wasted if you arrive to the meeting feeling tired and sluggish. Make sure you are well rested so you can **impress your interviewer(s) with your energy and clear thoughts.**
- Always dress professionally, bring extra copies of your resume, and leave plenty of time to travel. If you've done the necessary preparation, the interview is yours to ace. Good luck!

Telling Your Story Visually on Social Media

Credit: Climate Action Campaign



When you're crafting a message on social media, creating a narrative is important to its success.

Tara McMahon is the digital creative director at Climate Action Campaign, where she focuses on telling the story of climate change and finding innovative ways to convey the detailed science of climate change.

"Given the nature of platforms like Facebook and Twitter," said McMahon, "images and graphics offer an important opportunity to engage the reader in your story."

We asked McMahon to offer the YALI Network her tips for incorporating compelling visuals into online campaigns.

1. Create a mini-campaign "brand" for a set of visuals.

Using consistent fonts, colors and design elements helps drive the overarching message visually.

2. Pick the best approach for telling your story.

Info graphics are helpful for distilling finds in reports, photos are best for highlighting real-life impacts, and quotes and graphics are good for elevating direct stories.

3. Use your resources!

The Internet is full of free and low-cost resources: templates for infographics, free fonts, color palette generators, Creative Commons photos and more.

4. Think of visuals as a companion to your messaging.

For example, visuals can help tell a story about real-world local impacts of a global problem like climate change. It's important to start with a strong message you're looking to convey. Then visuals help give more context so you can craft a story that will really resonate with the viewer.

5. Be creative!

Trying new things is the best way to determine what works with your audience. Test out using two different types of visuals that convey the same story and see which one engages people the most.

Promoting Yourself: Why You Have to Do It and How to Do It Well

An entrepreneur promotes his new smartphone at the 2014 DEMO Conference in San Jose, California. (Stephen Brashear)

This post was adapted from [a presentation](#) by Rhett Power, an entrepreneur and leadership expert. To learn more about Rhett, visit his website at RhettPower.com.

If you look at the most successful people in any field, you'll almost always see someone incredibly talented in the art of self-promotion. I speak with lots of professionals and often they say, "I don't have to be bothered with selling myself. I'll let my record do that."

The problem is that only people familiar with your story understand your skill set. For the rest of the world, you have to do some purposeful marketing. The fact is that marketing is required in today's business world. You wouldn't create an awesome product and never advertise it. Apply that same logic to yourself. You have to promote yourself, your ideas, your accomplishments and your business today to get ahead.

Ready to get started? Follow these steps:

- **Be confident in yourself.** If you aren't inspired by your actions or ideas, no one else will be either.
- **Determine your unique value.** Understand what makes you different than your peers: your strengths, your passions and your goals. If you left your job today, what would your company and colleagues miss?

- **Update your CV.** Ensure that your resume accurately reflects who you are and is in line with both your short-term and long-term goals. If you need help defining your goals, check out the YALI Network lesson [Setting and Achieving Goals](#).
- **Build a network.** Set up accounts at social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Ask those in your target audience to subscribe to your pages and update on a daily basis. Make sure your updates are germane to your business and expertise. Want to improve your networking skills in real life? Take the YALI Network lesson [Networking to Get Ahead](#).
- **Be social.** Change your profile picture and update your work status on all social media. Sell yourself by being current and providing the world with up-to-date information. When possible, find a way to display your personal creed.
- **Create your own website.** Your website should highlight your professional accomplishments and skills while reflecting your beliefs and overall value. Make it about you — not your company or clients. Learn to talk about yourself and become comfortable telling your story.
- **Become a thought leader in your field.** Use a blog or a platform such as LinkedIn to blog about your industry or profession.


Be active in your community. Look for opportunities to join local decisionmaking boards or to speak at local civic clubs. Being visible is the best way to build your audience. Nervous about public speaking? Watch this YALI Network lesson: [The Art of Public Speaking](#).

Professional Development Through Internships

About 100 young Africans have developed better professional skills after serving in professional internships at a variety of U.S. business, government, cultural and humanitarian organizations.

These young professionals say their experiences have provided new insights into organizational operations, communications and mission accomplishment. They say participating in an internship can be a learning experience at any age, and should not be considered a workplace experience for students alone.

A few young African professionals and the workplace mentors who have guided them through their internships made a recent appearance in a Washington panel discussion and shared their insights with an online audience.

“It’s an exciting journey to put the pieces of the puzzle together so it can help my experience  back home. For me, that’s huge,” said Irene Chikumbo, who interned at the U.S. African Development Foundation. She is from Zimbabwe where she is a cofounder and community manager at the [Hypercube Technology Hub](#). Irene is working to build information technology capabilities in

Harare and encourage digital startups.


Irene interned at the [U.S. African Development Foundation](#), an organization with a large institutional culture and global operations. It's a very different workplace from Irene's Harare nonprofit organization.

"The internship has helped me understand some things that I would probably not have understood as an entrepreneur: understanding systems and processes and building relationships. [These are experiences] that I probably never would have had if I hadn't come on the internship."

Panel members – interns and mentors alike – described their relationship as one of give-and-take. Interns can learn a lot in a professional workplace, but they need to give a lot also.

"The most important thing is energy and interest," said Karen Carter, a [Smithsonian Institution](#) mentor, "and a commitment to lifelong learning."


Mohammed Umar is a civil servant in Nigeria who served a Washington internship at the [U.S. Department of Transportation](#). In this workplace, Mohammed said he developed better decision-making skills and discovered how to evaluate resources, needs and operational conditions to arrive at better policies.

"By the time I'm going home," Mohammed said during a panel, "I would really love to apply  that pattern that will help me to coordinate our major goals, our policies back home, and our major actions to enable us to become much more productive and change the way we do business to conform with modern international challenges in the 21st century."

Sheila Helton-Intram, Mohammed's mentor at the Department of Transportation, said he quickly learned one of the first lessons of internship. "When you come in as an intern, you have to jump in, [and] hit the ground rolling."

Working in a racially and culturally diverse workplace is an important experience Jean Pierre Maro will take home to Senegal from his internship at the Smithsonian Institution. He said he's come to recognize racial and cultural diversity as "richness" and assets that help a leader develop better policies and make better decisions.

"There's no way you are going to implement good policies that are going to have good impacts if you [do not] have diversity in mind as a starting point."

Jean Pierre Maro founded [Bridge Kids Senegal](#), a nonprofit organization devoted to providing  schooling for underprivileged children.

Besides their internships, these young African professionals also participated in the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) and attended U.S. educational institutional for about five weeks during June and July. They then attended a Washington summit with 500 other YALI fellows, engaging with top national leaders including President Obama and first lady Michelle Obama.

Watch the whole panel discussion to learn more:
